

[home](#) > [expertise](#) > [graduate student research](#) > ursula gurney[Faculty Spotlight](#)[Use of Force and
Diplomacy](#)[Ideas, Identities
and Decisional
Processes that
Affect Security](#)[Institutions that
Manage Violent
Conflict](#)[Graduate Student
Research](#)

The United States and European Détente: Nixon, Ford, and the Helsinki Accords, 1969- 1975

Principal Investigators: Ursula Gurney

When Richard Nixon became president in 1969, he attempted to manage America's global Cold War with the policy of détente. This policy was designed to contain the spread of communism through negotiation rather than confrontation; however, American hegemony continued to be challenged by the Soviet Union, China and Third World nationalists.

By the time Gerald Ford took office in 1974, détente had become synonymous with weakness. The 1970s were one of the most challenging decades for officials in Washington, as Nixon and Ford both faced the dilemma of managing America's vulnerable position in a hostile and diverse international order.

Focusing on the theme of transition during the Cold War, Gurney examines the role played by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and resulting Helsinki Accords of 1975 in restructuring American policies, transatlantic relations, and the East-West divide.

The CSCE was the first multilateral conference of the Cold War, offering hope that the shadow of confrontation, fear, and war would no longer loom over Europe. Although the United States was a reluctant participant, the conference provided an opportunity to engage in diplomatic negotiations. America sought to thwart Soviet advancements in Europe, negotiate with the Soviets over nuclear issues, limit Soviet activities in the Third World, improve damaged relationships with Western allies, and bolster the image of détente at home and abroad.

With Mershon Center funding, Gurney conducted research at the British National Archives in Kew to examine documents pertaining to Britain's role in the construction of the CSCE and



Ursula Gurney

Department of History
The Ohio State University

London's relationship with Washington. She studied records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Cabinet Office, and Prime Minister's Office. Gurney's project fell just after the 30-year release for diplomatic documents, allowing her to investigate a wealth of unexplored information including documents on the follow-up conference to CSCE in 1977.

Gurney also traveled to Washington to research the records of the CIA and Departments of State, Defense, and Legislative Affairs. She also studied both print and oral sources in the Richard Nixon Presidential Materials at the National Archives.

Gurney focuses on four main issues in the relationship between the CSCE and Helsinki conference and American policy making.

- The role CSCE played in containing the Soviet Union.
- The impact of the Helsinki conference on America's relationship with its Atlantic partners, and the emergence of different strategies and competing visions for European stability among Britain and the United States
- The role Helsinki played in the formation of American Cold War strategy, especially how the United States dealt with a fluid world order it no longer controlled.
- The domestic aspects of Helsinki, especially how Ford dealt with the negative perception of détente at home and why he pushed ahead to support the conference.

Gurney will present her findings in her dissertation for the Department of History.

© 2006-08 Mershon Center for International Security Studies

1501 Neil Ave.

Columbus, OH 43201

Phone: 614.292.1681

Fax: 614.292.2407

Email: mershoncenter@osu.edu